

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOV, PINS, NI

SUBJECT: OBASANJO HOLDS PRESS CONFERENCE

SYMMARY: IN HIGHLY PUBLICIZED PRESS CONFERENCE, THE PRINCIPAL PURPOSE OF WHICH APPEARED BE INGRATIATE NEW LEADERSHIP WITH PUBLIC AND PRESS WITH SHOW OF REASONABLENESS, BRIGADIER OBASANJO SAID THERE WOULD BE NO RPT NO PUBLIC PROBE INTO ALLEGATIONS OF CORRUPTION OFFICIALS FORMER REGIME. HE PROMISED AN OPEN, LOW PROFILE ADMINISTRATION WHICH WOULD SEEK RESPOND TO DESIRES OF NIGERIANS AND WHICH WOULD CARRY OUT ITS PROGRAMS IN MILITARY MANNER. HE SAID NEW HEAD OF STATE'S FIRST SPEECH WOULD TOUCH ON QUESTION RETURN CIVILIAN RULE. END SUMMARY.

1. BRIGADIER OLUSEGUN OBASANJO, CHIEF OF STAFF SUPREME HEADQUARTERS, AND GENERALLY CONSIDERED NUMBER TWO MAN IN NEW FMG, HELD PRESS CONFERENCE DODAN BARRACKS AUGUST 22. OBASANJO TOLD NEWSMEN THAT HIS GOVERNMENT INTENDED CARRY OUT ITS ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PROGRAMS WITH SPEED. HE SAID THE REGIME WOULD ADOPT A MILITARY POSTURE IN ALL ITS ACTIONS, BUT BE AN OPEN ADMINISTRATION, CLOSE TO THE PEOPLE AND RESPONSIVE TO ASPIRATIONS OF NIGERIANS. AT SAME
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TIME, FMG WOULD NOT BE DICTATED TO BY ANYONE AND EVERY ACTION

WOULD BE RESULT OF EXTENSIVE DISCUSSION AND CAREFUL CONSIDERATION.

2. OBASANJO SAID FMG DID NOT RPT NOT SEEK SELF-GLORIFICATION AND THAT IT INTENDED ADOPT "LOW PROFILE" WHICH NEW LEADERSHIP THINKS IS IN KEEPING WITH WHAT MILITARY REGIME OUGHT TO BE. HE EMPHASIZED NEW LEADERSHIP NOT OUT TO CONDUCT WITCH HUNT NOR VICTIMIZE ANYONE FOR HIS VIEWS BUT THAT LEADERS AT ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT (PAST AND PRESENT) WOULD BE HELD ACCOUNT-ABLE FOR THEIR ACTIONS.

3. OBASANJO SAID PRESS HAD ROLE TO INFORM PEOPLE, NOTED THAT NEW LEADERSHIP WANTED TO MAINTAIN CORDIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH PRESS, HAD NO COMPLAINTS THUS FAR BUT CAUTIONED AGAINST SENSATIONALIZING "DELICATE" NATIONAL ISSUES OR PUBLISHING STORIES WITHOUT FIRST CHECKING FACTS.

4. IN QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIOD WHICH FOLLOWED STATEMENT, OBASSANJO COMMENTED:

(A) ON CORRUPTION: THERE WOULD BE NO RPT NO PUBLIC PROBE OF ANY INDIVIDUAL BUT NOTED THERE OTHER WAYS TO CHECK ON DEEDS OF PAST LEADERS, E.G. ASSETS DECLARATIONS (COMMENT: WHICH HAVE ALREADY BEEN REQUESTED FROM FORMER GOVERNORS, FEDERAL CIVIL COMMISSIONERS, CERTAIN POLICE OFFICERS AND OTHER OFFICIALS).

(B) ON SPATE OF RETIREMENTS AND FIRINGS: THOSE PUBLIC SERVANTS WHO HAVE BEEN RETIRED HAVE BEEN FOUND TO HAVE FALLEN SHORT OF CERTAIN CRITERIA- AGE, HEALTH, INEFFICIENCY IN PERFORMANCE OF DUTY OR MALPRACTICES IN OFFICE.

(C) ON GENERAL GOWON - HE WILL BE FREE TO RETURN TO NIGERIA IF HE WANTS TO COME BACK.

(D) ON OJUKWU - NEW LEADERSHIP HAS NO RPT NO ATTITUDE.

(E) ON RETURN TO CIVILIAN RULE: THE FIRST MAJOR SPEECH OF NEW HEAD OF STATE WILL INCLUDE A POLITICAL PROGRAM IN "OUT-LINE FORM."

(F) ON REDUCING SIZE OF ARMY - SUBJECT IS RECEIVING ATTENTION.

5. COMMENT: OBASSANJO'S EFFORT APPEARED BE ATTEMPT ESTABLISH GOOD RAPPORT WITH PRESS (WHICH HAS BEEN MOST ENTHUSIASTIC OVER CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT AND INCREASINGLY CRITICAL GOWON ADMINISTRATION) AND TELL NIGERIAN PUBLIC THAT THE COUNTRY'S LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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NEW LEADERSHIP IS AWARE OF THEIR CONCERNS AND IS PREPARED TO LISTEN TO THEM. PRESS TOLD IT HAS ROLE PLAY IN MOLDING PUBLIC OPINION IN SUPPORT GOVERNMENT'S ACTIONS. OBASANJO'S MANNER WA CRISP AND VERY MILITARY.

6. ON RETURN CIVILIAN RULE, OBASANJO MADE NO COMMITMENTS, LEAVING THAT FOR SUBJECT OF SUBSEQUENT MUHAMMED SPEECH-- PERHAPS ON OCTOBER 1ST, ANNIVERSARY OF NIGERIAN INDEPENDENCE.

MANY INTELLECTUALS AND PRESS CONTINUE HOPE THAT GOVERNMENT WILL BE RETURNED TO CIVILIAN RULE SOMETIME DURING NEXT THREE YEARS. WHILE THERE MAY BE SOME IN MILITARY WHO FAVOR RETURN CIVILIAN RULE, ATTITUDE OF COLONELS AND OTHERS WHO FORM THIS NEW GOVERNMENT NOT YET AT ALL CLEAR. AT THIS POINT IT SEEMS DOUBTFUL THEY ANXIOUS TO TURN OVER REIGNS OF POWER WHICH THEY HAVE WAITED SO LONG SEIZE. IN RESPONSE TO POPULAR PRESSURE, FMG WILL LIKELY POSTULATE DRAFTING OF NEW CONSTITUTION AND OTHER MEASURES AS PRELUDE TO RETURN TO CIVILIAN RULE. STUDY PANELS MAY BE PROMISED, BUT THE GOVERNMENT WILL PRESUMABLY SEEK TO AVOID BOXING ITSELF IN WITH SPECIFIC DATES.

7. OBASANJO'S REJECTION OF PUBLIC PROBES INTO ASSETS OF FORMER OFFICIALS APPEARED BE ATTEMPT DEFUSE PRESSURES FOR FISHING EXPEDITIONS, GIVE NEW REGIME OPTION OF DETERMINING WHPJH OFFICIALS--IF ANY--TO BE MADE SCAPEGOATS. IT APPEARS LIKELY SOME EX-OFFICIALS MAY BE THROWN TO WOLVES (SECURITY MEN REMOVED FORMER BLACK ARTS COMMISSIONER ANTHONY ENAHORO FROM A PLANE AT IKEJA AIRPORT SUNDAY, PREVENTING HIM FROM LEAVING COUNTRY). NEVERTHELESS, NEW REGIME APPEARS TO BE PROCEEDING CAREFULLY, LEST ONE INVESTIGATION SET OFF CHAIN REACTION THAT WOULD ENGULF SOME OF ITS OWN MEMBERS.
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